

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03
NSAE-00 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00
INRE-00 SSM-03 IO-13 OMB-01 TRSE-00 ACDA-12 SSC-01
EB-08 EUR-12 /098 W
-----009785 280623Z /14

O R 271725Z MAR 78 ZDK CTG JCS5770 VOL TO OTHERS
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7385
INFO AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
USLO RIYADH
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1708

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, SY, PINR
SUBJECT: NEW SYRIAN CABINET TO BE FORMED

1. SUMMARY: KHULAYFAWI HAS BEEN REPLACED AS PRIME MINISTER
BY PEOPLE'S COUNCIL CHAIRMAN HALABI. NAJI JAMIL HAS RESIGNED
ALL HIS POSITIONS AND IS BEING REPLACED AS COMMANDER OF THE
AIR FORCE BY SUBHI HADDAD. PERSONNEL CHANGES ARE NOT
EXPECTED TO LEAD TO MAJOR POLICY CHANGES. SUPERFICIALLY
IT APPEARS THAT RIFAT AL-ASSAD HAS STRENGTHENED HIS POSITION
BUT AT THIS POINT IT IS TOO EARLY TO MAKE ANY FIRM CONCLUSIONS.
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END SUMMARY.

2. DAMASCUS RADIO DURING ITS 2:15 PM (LT) NEWS BROADCAST
ANNOUNCED THAT PEOPLE'S COUNCIL PRESIDENT MUHAMMAD ALI AL-
HALABI HAS BEEN SELECTED TO FORM A NEW CABINET. CURRENT PRIMIN
KHULAYFAWI ASKED TO STAY ON UNTIL NEW CABINET FORMED. IN
ADDITION, NAJI JAMIL HAS SUBMITTED HIS RESIGNATION AS COMMANDER

OF THE AIR FORCE. WE UNDERSTAND FROM NUMEROUS SOURCES THAT HE HAS RESIGNED ALL OF HIS POSITIONS IN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE PARTY. ONE REPORT INDICATES THAT HE IS UNDER HOUSE ARREST WHILE OTHERS SAY HE STILL HAS ROLE TO PLAY IN SARG.

3. JAMIL HAS BEEN REPLACED BY GENERAL SUBHI HADDAD, A SUNNI FROM HAMA, AS COMMANDER OF THE AIR FORCE. HE IS A BAATHI AND WAS FORMERLY COMMANDER OF THE 70TH AF BRIGADE AT MEZZE. WE HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT HE IS LOYAL TO THE PRESIDENT AND THAT HE IS A PROFESSIONAL WITH NO OTHER SUBSIDIARY LOYALTIES. JAMIL'S DEPUTY, GENERAL ADNAN JABI, HAS ALSO BEEN REPLACED BY GENERAL IBRAHIM AL-HASSAN. HASSAN WAS DEPUTY COMMANDER OF THE AIR FORCE FOR AIR MATTERS AND BEFORE THAT WAS THE COMMANDER OF THE TIYAS 50TH FIGHTER BOMBER WING. HE ALSO SERVED AS MILITARY ATTACHE TO YUGOSLAVIA. HASSAN, ACCORDING TO ONE REPORT, IS A SUPPORTER TO RIFAT AL-ASSD. WE HAVE NO CONFIRMATION OF THIS INFORMATION.

4. AT THIS POINT WE HAVE DIFFERENCES OF OPINION AMONG OUR SOURCES AS TO WHETHER THE HALABI SELCTION AS PRIMIN WAS RELATED TO JAMIL'S RESIGNATION. NEVERTHELESS, WE WERE INFORMED BY SEVERAL SOURCES LAST JULY/AUGUST THAT HALABI WAS THE PROTEGE OF RIFAT AL-ASSAD IN THE PEOPLE'S COUNCIL ELECTIONS. SINCE JAMIL IS A LONG-TIME OPPONENT OF RIFAT'S, HIS OUSTER AND HALABI'S ELEVATION ARE LEADING TO THE PREVALENT FEELING THAT RIFAT'S POSITION HAS BEEN STRENGTHENED.
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5. WE HAVE HEARD SEVERAL STORIES AS TO WHY JAMIL HAS BEEN REPLACED. ACCORDING TO ONE STORY, JAMIL OPPOSED THE PRESIDENT'S POLICY IN LEBANON AND WANTED SYRIA TO PLAY A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN SUPPORTING THE PALESTINIANS AND CONFRONTING THE ISRAELIS. FRANKLY, WE FIND THIS REPORT DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE. JAMIL HAS NEVER DEMONSTRATED ANY LOVE FOR THE PALESTINIANS OR SUICIDAL TENDENCIES WHEN IT CAME TO AIR FORCE ACTIVITIES. ACCORDING TO HAMMOUD SHOEFI, WHO HAS A DIFFERENT SLANT, BUT NOT NECESSARILY MORE RELIABLE, JAMIL'S PROBLEM RELATED TO INTERNAL POLITICS. QUOTING NABIH HASSUN, MEMBER OF THE REGIONAL COMMAND, SHOEFI SAID THAT THE PRESIDENT BLAMED JAMIL AND ALI DUBA, CHIEF OF G-2, FOR THE INTELLIGENCE SYSTEMS' INABILITY TO DEAL WITH THE RECENT ASSASSINATIONS OF ALAWITES. DUBA, WE UNDERSTAND HAS BEEN FROZEN IN HIS POSITION AND HIS FUNCTIONS ARE BEING HANDLED BY HIS DEPUTY. THAT THE ASSASSINATION PROBLEM IS WEIGHING HEAVILY ON THE PRESIDENT'S MIND IS HIGHLIGHTED BY TWO INDEPENDENT REPORTS WE HAVE HAD THAT VARIOUS ALAWITE PROFESSORS IN ALEPPO AND DAMASCUS HAVE TENDERED THEIR RESIGNATIONS OUT OF FEAR. IN FACT, THERE WAS AN UNCONFIRMED REPORT THAT ANOTHER ALAWITE, A MS. KHIAR WAS ASSASSINATED IN LATAKIA OVER PAST WEEKEND. SHE

WAS SUPPOSEDLY A RELATIVE OF SELWA NAJIB, THE MOTHER OF RIFAT'S FAVORITE WIFE.

6. AS FOR GOVERNMENT CHANGES, IT IS TOO EARLY TO SORT OUT RUMOR FROM FACT BUT ALL INDICATIONS ARE THAT HALABI'S APPOINTMENT IS EXPECTED TO CONFIRM SYRIA IN ITS COURSE OF MEASURED LIBERALIZATION OF THE ECONOMY AS ANNOUNCED BY PRESIDENT IN HIS MARCH 8 INAUGURAL SPEECH. HALABI DOES NOT HAVE AN INDEPENDENT POWER BASE; HE IS WHOLLY DEPENDENT ON THE AL-ASSAD BROTHERS. PROMINENT BUSINESSMAN TOLD ECONOFF THAT RUMORED APPOINTMENT TO ECONOMIC PORTFOLIOS INDICATE NEW GOVERNMENT WILL NOT REPEAT NOT BE MORE LEFTIST IN ITS ECONOMIC ORIENTATION AHT ITS PREDECESSOR. LENDING CREDENCE TO THIS IS BUSINESSMAN'S REPORT THAT MINPLANNING GEORGE HORANIEH, WHO HAS INCREAS-
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INGLY ESPOUSED MOVE TO LEFT IN RECENT MONTHS, "IS DEFINITELY OUT". IMMEDIATE REACTION FROM BUSINESS COMMUNITY IS FAVORABLE.

7. THE IMPACT ON FOREIGN POLICY IS EQUALLY DIFFICULT TO GUESS AT THIS POINT. IF RIFAAT'S ROLE HAS BEEN STRENGTHENED THROUGH APPOINTMENT OF PEOPLE LOYAL TO HIM TO KEY POSITIONS, AND WE EMPHASIZE THIS IS SUPPORTED THUS FAR BY CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE, THE INVESTMENT THE SOVIETS HAVE MADE IN HIM IN THE PAST YEARS MIGHT PAY OFF MARGINALLY. NEVERTHELESS, WE HAVE UNDERSTOOD THAT RIFAT HAS HAD MISGIVINGS ABOUT SYRIA'S HARDLINE ON SADAT AND MIGHT COUNSEL SOME MODERATION IN THIS REGARD. IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, RIFAT IS A MAN WHO LOOKS OUT FOR HIMSELF, REGARDLESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL INTERESTS INVOLVED AND THE PRESIDENT LOOKS OUT FOR SYRIA'S FOREIGN POLICY REGARDLESS OF RIFAT.
MURPHY

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Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3197772
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: NEW SYRIAN CABINET TO BE FORMED
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, PINR, SY
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Type: TE
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